



## Unfolding Breath by Caroline

The breath is our constant companion. We are connected to everything else by the air we all breathe, participating daily in an estimated 17 to 20 thousand breaths.

Because our body-mind is a whole, the way we stand, move, sit, walk, talk, think all profoundly affects our breath. How we imagine we should or could be breathing changes the way we actually breathe and therefore our health, our sense of well-being.

Our lungs have a capacity of around 6 litres but only a small amount is generally used. The commonly absorbed idea that a deep breath is only associated with the chest and upper body creates tension in neck and shoulders and upper back and stimulates our already over-stimulated nervous system. Actually much of the significant gas exchange takes place in the lower part of the lungs.

Central to each breath is the movement of the diaphragm, a large dome-shaped muscle that sits over our abdominal organs and underneath our lungs and heart and moves down as we inhale and up as we exhale.

The natural breathing movements of a baby or an animal appear to involve their whole being. When our body starts to relax we might experience that our breath has a felt relationship with the back of our body, the base of our skull, our spine, our pelvic floor and even our feet.

Yoga places us within the special discovery of the inside movements of the diaphragm and lungs and the depth, rhythm and pleasure of the breath. The breath responds well to less controlling and more space, comfort, kindness. As we uncover its natural unfolding movements every part of the body can renew itself, our nervous system comes to rest.

Some of my favourite places for breathing deeply are in a hot bath, by the sea, lying under trees.